

A Time for Anger

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[0 : 00] Let's just turn back to that chapter then and we'll look at it together, the whole of the chapter.

Then I saw, page 1245, Revelation chapter 15, then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing. Seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

The first thing that strikes me about this passage is what was amazing to John is horrific to others. There's a huge contrast in the way you might respond to this chapter or the way, if I can put it simply, the way that this chapter might make you feel.

And that's part of the message and the power of the Bible. It is God's intention that we feel something as we read the Bible. And there is something terribly wrong if we don't feel something as we read the Bible and as we come together here this evening, as we hear what we believe with all our hearts to be God's word.

But I want us to notice the great contrast. John is given a vision of heaven itself. And John is absolutely thrilled beyond words with what he sees.

[1 : 35] That's because John is a child of God. He is saved by grace. He knows that by believing in Jesus Christ, he is safe and secure.

And that whatever God is going to do to the world, whatever punishments that God is going to bring about in this world, and whatever the wrath of God means, and that's what we find this chapter is all about, whatever that means and however that manifests itself, whatever horror that he's going to see, he knows that ultimately the scene is one of utter amazement to him.

That's why he opens the chapter with these words. I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing. He is awestruck by what he sees, but he's not horrified by what he sees.

Why is it that he's not horrified? Because he knows that the God who is giving him this vision, and from whom what the chapter is all about, whether it's punishment or judgment or destruction, and it will be, he knows that whatever God does is going to be right.

And so he's able to completely trust himself in the glory and the holiness of God. That's what faith means. Faith means coming to God as he is, and trusting in God in the person of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 08] However, that doesn't mean to say that we are not filled with a mixture of discomfort. While we share the amazement of John, we also share the uneasiness of belonging to a world that is under the wrath and the anger of God.

And if that doesn't make us feel uneasy, then there is something wrong with us. It makes us feel uneasy because if you're a Christian tonight, you are bound to know someone who isn't a Christian. There's somebody in your family who isn't a Christian. That means that God is angry with that person. Furthermore, we live amongst people who aren't Christians.

And does it not make us feel horrified to think of a community, a town, a country, a world? That's what this chapter is all about. That's what the whole of the book of Revelation is all about.

You can't get away from it. There's no easy way of preaching through the themes and the chapters in Revelation. Time and time and time again, God comes to us in various visions.

[4 : 21] We'll recap them in a few moments' time. He comes to us in various visions through John, and he tells us that this world is subject to his anger and his judgment.

That's the whole of the story or, if you like, the message of the book. Everywhere you look, you can't hide from the fact that God will one day come and bring judgment and final punishment to the earth.

And I know what I sound like right now. I know I sound like the wee man I used to see walking in Glasgow with a placard on his back, prepare to meet thy God. And he was ridiculed.

You know, I don't know if you've done so many of these guys anymore, but they used to preach on the streets of Glasgow, and it was always the same message. It was a message of the judgment of God.

And you know, people laughed. I remember being in Germany once, and hearing there was, in one of these great big cities, there was, at one end of the square, there was a jester.

[5 : 22] And the jester had a huge crowd of people with him. I saw him, and he was very talented. He was a fire eater, and all that kind of thing. He was enthralling the hundreds of people. At the other end of the crowd, my German wasn't very good, but I could tell that he was a preacher.

There were about three or four people listening to that preacher. At the other same place. And that's how the gospel has always been perceived. It's always been confined to those, these funny people, these odd people.

And it's the same tonight, as we're going through the book of Revelation. There's something predictable about it. If you've come here tonight, hoping to hear some new message, you're not going to, I hope I'm not disappointing you, you're not going to hear a new message.

There is no new message. And you can respond to it in various ways. You can laugh at it. If you laugh at it long enough, then it probably will go away. The feeling will go away.

You can make a laugh and a joke out of anything. But that doesn't mean the reality is going to go away. The feeling might. But the reality won't. And the shock will be all the more.

[6 : 31] When we discover one day that the person who preached and shared the gospel was right all along, you see, either tonight, I am right and you are wrong, or you're right and I'm wrong.

There's no way we can both be right. Because the message that this world wants you to believe is the total opposite from the message that the gospel, that the Lord wants you to believe in the gospel.

And if you dress it up nicely, if you dress up the message nicely, it doesn't sound too bad. But that doesn't obscure. That might obscure the gospel in your own mind, but it doesn't take away the facts.

The facts will always remain. Besides, it's not only revelation that speaks about God's judgment. In Romans chapter 1, verse 18, the apostle Paul, it tells us this, that the wrath of God, it says, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

That means you and I, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

[7 : 52] So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, now here's where we've gone wrong. Do you want to know where you've gone wrong? Paul tells us, read it later on in chapter 1, verse 18.

Let me read it for you. Verse 21, For though they knew God, there's something within the heart of every one of us that knows that there is a God. For though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but became futile in their thinking.

We prefer futility and emptiness and superficiality, and we prefer a virtual reality reality to the reality of God. And their foolish hearts were darkened, claiming to be wise.

They became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images and so on and so forth. That's what Paul says. It's not just Revelation that talks about God's judgment and his punishment.

The apostle Peter says exactly the same thing. Let me read it. Some of what he says in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 8. Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

[9 : 01] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some account slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night and then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed and so on.

You can read more of it. We don't have time to read it all this evening. But you know what surprises people? What surprises people most is how much the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John speak about the end time and God's judgment, that God's bringing this world to a conclusion and

the conclusion will be his judgment and his punishment upon the earth.

And what surprises people even more is the part that Jesus is going to play in this event. Luke chapter 3, verse 17. These are the words of John the Baptist.

His winnowing fork, that's Jesus, winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

[10:13] Now it seems to me that we absolutely have to come to terms with what God says about himself in the Bible.

You see, to me it comes down to this. The choice is either to invent your own God in your own image, a God who will say all the right things to you and give you the happiness that you're looking for and tick all the right boxes that you want him to tick and allow you to carry on as you are in your own self-centeredness and sure, if that's the kind of God you're looking for, you can easily find him or it or she whatever you want.

A do-it-yourself God a self-invented deity made to measure made to the customer's requirements. You make the specification, you tell what you want, you say what you want and he'll come out just as you want it. Sure, you can be like that if you want.

You can live like that if you want. You can say, I prefer to think of God as. Loads of people think that way. And the God they believe in is a God that they've invented in their own minds, in their own hearts.

[11:35] Happens all over the world. You can find religion that will give you that kind of God as well. Certain religious practices. I'm not going to start going into them this evening. And a God will tell you that everything will be okay and whatever life you've lived, well, you know, everything will be fine.

You'll be accepted in the end. Everything will turn out right. You know, if you live like that, there'll always be an uneasy question and it will never go away. And the question is this, am I right? Is my God the true and the living, the ultimate God? Or is he a figment of my own imagination? You know, it's quite ridiculous to suggest that, as some people do, that the Bible has been invented by men and women who really simply created God in their own image.

You know, if I was going to do that, he would be entirely the opposite to the God as he is in the Bible. Let's say I was to sit down tonight with a blank sheet and if I was to start writing my own Bible.

[12:41] Imagine I was to do that. Imagine I was to say, right, let's forget about the Bible. I want to start afresh and I want to write my own Bible. I would create and invent a God that was concerned for my happiness and my pleasure and he let me live any way I wanted to live.

I would be wanting a God who gave me anything and anything my heart desired. Never mind what's right and wrong. What matters is what I feel like doing and my God, the God of my invention, would just, he would just surround me and he would focus on me and then he would give, he would let me live my life the way I will.

You know, the sky's the limit, isn't it? But in the Bible, God presents himself not from my perspective, but he begins with his perspective.

He says, in the beginning, God, that's where life begins. That's where my life begins. That's where your life begins and that's who you owe your life to.

So, I hope that tonight you're not asking what kind of God you would like him to be, but what is God and what does he say about himself.

[14:05] No matter how uncomfortable that makes me feel, even if it terrifies me, I want to really honestly, don't you?

Don't you honestly think that this is the most important issue in the world? You take all your other priorities, all the things that are crises in your life, and really, they can all be put to one side in comparison with this, even if it terrifies me.

And you know, sometimes we invent our own crises and our own issues in order to get away from the reality of what God is and who God is. But at the end of the day, it will catch up with you.

It has to catch up with you. You can't escape from the reality of God. And I believe the rise of atheism in the UK that we've seen so powerfully over the last few years is partly to do with, not with the idea of there being a God, but specifically the Lord as he reveals himself in the Bible and the way it makes us feel so uncomfortable and so uneasy.

But if it is true, if he truly is the one he says he is in the Bible, then it is absolutely essential for me to get to grips with who he is and my relationship with him.

[15 : 32] and finally, what I am and who I am in myself.

So as we read these two chapters, 15 and 16, we have to put away your preconceived ideas. You have to put away your hatred of the Bible, your natural animosity, your natural dislike, and you have to ask honestly, is this the message that tonight God wants me to hear?

It's different. The message of Revelation is slightly put in a different form from the Gospels, but it goes alongside the Gospels. The whole Bible fits in like a jigsaw together. Each of the books, they fit together like a jigsaw.

This part is mysterious. There are things that need to be explained, but this is the language that God is using on this occasion to explain his will and his plan and his purpose to myself.

So we've looked then at John's amazement in comparison with our sense of discomfort and that's the contrast. But secondly, I want us to look very briefly at the finality of this.

[16 : 42] We've seen that the book of Revelation is a series of visions and if you remember a year ago, we looked into some of the difficulties that there were in trying to understand or interpret the book of Revelation and there are many difficulties and many different ideas that people have as to whether they look upon each chapter as an unfolding of future events that are literally going to be taking place in the history of the world or are they a series of parallel events.

We've seen how the book begins with Christ in the midst, in the middle of the five, sorry, the seven golden lampstands. Then we saw the scene in heaven in chapter four where the book with the seven seals and the lamb who was able to open the scroll.

Then we saw the seven trumpets of God's judgment being sounded. These seven trumpets affect the whole world. Then we saw the woman, the mysterious vision with the woman and the child, a very clear reference to the birth of Jesus.

The child is caught up to God and his throne and the dragon who was waiting for the birth of this woman who wasn't able to capture the child. He now persecutes the woman. We saw something of what we thought that that meant.

Then now there is the seven bowls. Another vision. Is this another part of God's unfolding future or is it another vision that tells the same thing as we've seen before?

[18 : 17] Well, I believe that that's what it is. I believe that this vision here in chapter 15 and 16, it's another way in which God gives us the same message as before.

A message in which God is going to bring final judgment on the world. But it begins in heaven. And there's this sense, isn't there, in this passage of a rumbling in heaven.

There's a movement in heaven. We've seen that there's a singing in heaven. But at the same time as God saves secure people are singing his praises in heaven, there's also a movement.

And where there is movement, it's not random. It's a preparation. God is preparing to bring his final, conclusive, ultimate judgment on the world.

And if you read the book of Revelation, that's what it's all about. It's moving towards the last chapters where God brings about his new heaven and his new earth and where everything that we knew of in this world and the world as we knew it, life as we knew it, will be destroyed and will all be in the past and it will all give way into the kingdom that God is preparing for his people.

[19 : 35] You know, it's quite amazing, isn't it, how we go over the, how we think that today's topics are the most important issues that ever faced mankind. Most of us are able to go back over 10 years and we're able to go back over some of the horrendous things that have taken place in the world.

Things that are on the world stage and certainly if not on the country stage. Things like, events like the 9-11. What a change that that brought about in our world.

In your world, in my world, it's involved a different way of thinking. It's brought in new language, new phrases, new phraseology like the war on terror for example.

Then we saw the war in Afghanistan, then the war in Iraq, 7-7 in London, tensions in North Korea, Iran, continuing tensions in the Middle East.

Prime Minister, one Prime Minister will retire, another Prime Minister will take his place. Each one of them, they constitute a different ethos, a different flavour to government.

[20 : 40] There will be different influences and different events taking place. Now we're in the middle of a credit crunch and now we're in the middle of an exposure of a system of MPs' expenses

that everybody seems to think is the greatest crisis.

I'm not saying it's not a crisis at all but you know, we focus on these things as if the world has never known anything like it before in the past. We're entirely wrong.

There is nothing, when you really think about it, there's nothing new about terrorism, there's nothing new about violence, there's nothing new about money grabbing or power grabbing or empire building, there's nothing new.

The whole, the history of the world is littered with exactly the same things. They may appear in different forms, they may use new technology to achieve their ends, but if you go through the history of the world, you see nothing but exactly the same thing, the struggling, this movement, and God has something to say about this world and this chapter is about the way in which God himself is moving in order to bring final judgment and a finality to this.

Now the Bible tells us the reason why he hasn't done so up until now and the reason is because God is patient. We just read that chapter in 2 Peter, not willing, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life.

[22 : 09] So there's a tension in this chapter, isn't there? There's a movement in this chapter, there's a rumbling, but it hasn't happened yet. He's preparing for it. There's a chapter of preparation.

Every time we go back to a chapter like this, we should be reminded that God is heading and planning towards that ultimate final day, but it hasn't happened yet.

We are still living in the age of the gospel when God is speaking to us in grace and in mercy and he is saying, come, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, trust in him before that day comes.

Because it's a day that will come. Anything that God prepares for, it will happen, for sure. It will happen. Otherwise, there'd be no such thing as God preparing for it.

You're not preparing for something that's not going to happen. But the fact that this chapter tells us that God is preparing for it, that it should be an indicator of how gracious and how kind and how loving God is.

[23 : 13] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. So God's purpose, his saving purpose in Jesus Christ, is that you shouldn't perish, that you should not be punished at the end of time, but that you should come and experience his forgiveness and the new life that he is prepared to give you and he wants to give you and he will give you if you come to him.

But make no mistake, make no mistake, the world in its current form is under the anger of what the Bible calls the wrath of God.

And that's the theme of the seven bowls in chapter 15, which tells about the preparation which God makes to pour out the seven bowls, but they're seven bowls of God's wrath.

The wrath of God is a reality. What is the anger of God? We tend to think of, perhaps I've said this before, but it's no harm in saying it again because we tend to misunderstand what the Bible says about the anger of God.

And the way we do that is because we link it with our anger, which is more often than not a sinful anger. It involves our uncontrolled nature, our loss of temper.

[24 : 42] We get angry more often than not because we're in a bad mood, because we've got up the wrong side of the bed, because things haven't gone our way, because someone said the wrong thing to us, because someone has acted in a way that we didn't expect them to act, or things have not gone as easy.

Things like that make us irritable and anger, and we're liable to say something that we'll regret later on, and that display our own sinfulness and wrongdoing. Most of our anger is unmanaged, it's uncontrolled, it's directed at the wrong things, and we tend to think of the anger of God as to say, nothing could be further from the truth.

God's anger is never sinful, it's never directed at the wrong purposes, it's never uncontrolled, it is always right. When you think about it in actual fact, anger by itself, in its pure form, is not sinful at all.

Which one of us wouldn't get angry if someone deliberately harmed our children? You'd have every right to be angry if somebody attacked your child, or violated your daughter, or did something that really brought hurt to your family, or to yourself, through his own badness.

Of course we would, we would be every right to, we would have every right to be angry in a situation like that. And that shows us that anger in its pure form is ultimate, original form, is good. [26 : 09] God would not be angry if it wasn't good in its original form. The problem is that we can't be angry without sinning at the same time. And it gets mixed up with a whole bunch of envy and pride and jealousy and all the other things that we can never, we can never be angry in a pure way. Never. And that's why it has to be managed. And it has to be controlled. And very often our anger is a sign of our own weakness and instability and insecurity. It is. You can never justify your own anger. It always displays our own sinfulness. But God can justify his. He can always do so.

And whatever form it takes in us, God's form of expressing his anger is always a right way and it's always good. There is a time for anger.

And this time is what we read about in this chapter. anger. And the second question is, it arises very naturally out of the first.

[27 : 18] Why is God angry? And I'm going to leave things like this for the time being. We'll come back to chapter 16 next week. But I'm going to say because if you don't ask these questions and if you don't answer these questions, you'll make no sense out of these chapters.

There's no point talking about the wrath of God if you don't know anything about it. Or if you think that it's ill-conceived or you think that God is not justified in being angry, there's no point in thinking. You'll never understand it if you have a wrong view of God. But having now discovered that God's wrath is right and is proper and is good and is perfect, no matter how terrifying it is, we have to ask the question that rises out of this, which of course is, why is God angry with the world?

Why? You know this, that's the easiest of all questions to answer.

Whatever question you might have of the Bible, God makes it abundantly plain. There is no secret, there's no mystery about God's anger, about why God is angry, is angry.

[28 : 39] There is only one thing that brings about what the Bible calls the wrath and the punishment of God, and that is what the Bible calls sin.

Now at this point you say, well I knew he was going to say that. I've heard all this before. I've read my Bible, I know all about this before.

Tell me something new. I can't tell you something new. That's the plain fact. That is what God says about us. We all fall into the same condition.

Our first reaction when we talk about sin, I don't know if I asked 300, 400 people tonight, what is sin, you might give me 300, 400 responses, depending on your own perception of sin.

One of the problems with the word sin is that if you don't understand what the Bible tells us about sin, you end up going off with your own ideas. I suppose like love and all of these other words that mean such different things to different people.

[29 : 43] And one of the great challenges, I've said this before, is to explain the Bible and the words in the Bible that hit home to us and that drive home the message that every single one of us is in the same condition tonight.

You can't afford to say, well, that belongs to someone else. And I know many people this evening and I hope that they're listening to this message because they could do with a good kick and they could do with somebody talking plain sense to them.

I know the way they've wasted their lives and the way that they've drunk and the way that they've been violent and the way that they've been abusive and I wish they were here tonight. I wish they were here so they could hear about God's anger.

In fact, I'm glad God is angry with these people because they ruin my life and they ruin the community and they ruin the world and that's what you think sin is. Sure, that's part of it. That's a small part of it.

But sin in all its forms is an affront to God whether it's a person who's violent or abusive or a person who makes the wrong use of his life or who wastes his life or a person who's proud and who refuses and listen to this to listen to the voice of God.

[31 : 03] That is what sin begins with God. If you don't begin with sin if you begin with what you think wrong doing is then you'll never capture the breadth and the seriousness of wrong doing in your own life.

You have to begin with God. God is your reference point. God is the source of your understanding. You'll never understand what you are and who you are in reference to God until you come to terms

with what he says about himself.

And sin is this. Let me try and explain it in a slightly different manner tonight I hope that will be helpful. We're always trying to look for new ways to explain. I'm all for it as long as they're biblical. As long as they accord with what the Bible teaches then I'm all for trying to find new ways of explaining what sin is. Let me put it in this ultra-modern contemporary psychoanalytical sense. last week I was on the ferry with a friend of mine. We were having this conversation. We started talking about various ways in which people define behavior, human behavior, particularly with regard to children.

[32 : 22] We started talking about the various terms that have been invented to define conditions, psychiatric conditions, psychological conditions, behavioral disorders.

Now, don't get me wrong, I am not bad-mouthing the work and the good research that has been done in that field. but we both agreed that perhaps it goes too far in trying to explain human behavior in terms of our own inventions and our own definitions and why, and it's about time perhaps that we just came back to plain badness.

and he said to me, have you ever heard of odd? I said, no, I've never heard of odd.

Well, he says, let me tell you what it means. Oppositional defiant disorder. You ever heard of odd? Maybe I'm a bit thick or ignorant or whatever, maybe I haven't been reading the right books. I'd never heard of it until this week. Oppositional defiant disorder.

[33 : 49] And my friend said, well, I don't really know much about it, it's not my field, but I was reading about it the other day. Why don't you go home and look at it on the internet? So I went home and I looked it up on the internet. Well, I was astonished. I did.

Whether it's Wikipedia or whatever the definition is, here's what it is. It's something that's found or defined particularly in children, and here are the symptoms. You close your eyes and you think of these symptoms.

What do you think of? Temper tantrums, annoyed by others, refusal to comply with rules, argumentative stance with adults, rude, uncooperative and confrontational attitude, use of mean-spirited language when upset, deliberate attempts to upset and annoy others, frequent bursts of anger or resentful attitude.

We hear this one. Tendency to blame others, outward and belligerent defiance and revengeful attitude.

Attitude. You know the first person I think about when I go down that list? I have to be honest with you. I don't think of some kid. I think that's a description of me.

[35 : 19] That's what I was. That's what I am in my heart. That's what the Bible tells me I am. And you know what the cheek of some people is? That they think that they're able to elevate themselves above others and to say he's got odd and I don't.

The fact is we are all in the same condition. And that list describes my life, my attitude, my condition and it was and it is because we are all to a greater or lesser extent we all defy God.

God says you shall love the Lord with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul and strength and we say I will not. That's the last thing I'm going to do. Whatever ambitions or objectives or aims or whatever I want to do with my life, that's the last thing that I want to do.

To love the Lord with all my mind. You sent me a few little guidelines as to how I live my life. I'm quite happy to comply with these guidelines. But don't ask me to love you. Because if I love you, that means that my life is wrapped up in God.

And I don't really fancy that. That's just not what gives me any kind of reason to live at all. What I say is, I will not have this man to reign over me.

[36 : 46] That's my condition. And if you're honest with yourself this evening, if you're not converted, that's exactly. You can call it sin or you can call it ODD. I don't care.

Well, in fact, you can change the word sin. It's only a word. As long as we understand the reason why God is angry with this world.

The reason why God is angry with, let's use a modern term, is because of its oppositional, defiant disorder. It's a disorder because it's not the way that God created us to be.

He created us perfectly with his image and his image and his likeness. It's defiant because God tells us one thing, we say, I won't do it.

It's oppositional because however God wants me to go, I want to go the other way. Now, I can't think of a better description of sin than that. That's exactly it to a T.

[37 : 43] And we're all in the same. But I'll tell you this, it's not just some and others. all of us are in the same condition unless our lives have been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you know what happens? You know what happens? When a person comes to Jesus and trusts in him by faith, the opposition disappears. The defiance disappears.

The disorder disappears. because God has healed us and brought us into communion with himself and changed our lives and created within us a new heart, a new beginning, a new love for him so that instead of, as I once would have said, I do not love God.

I now want to say with all my heart, I love him because he first loved me. you've got odd tonight whether you like it or not.

That's the way in which we're all born. But God can heal us. God can change us and bring us to newness of life through Jesus Christ.

[38 : 59] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will bring your word to us with power, with effect.

We ask, Lord, that you will show us that there is no other way to be right with you than by coming to Jesus Christ who came into this world, a world with oppositional defiant disorder and a world that he loved to change and to bring to himself.

Oh, Lord God, we give thanks for your amazing grace, amazing grace that brings us into communion and fellowship with yourself and changes our lives and our souls and our roles.

In Jesus' name, Amen.